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ABSTRACT

The views of three prominent figures concerning the current state of the book world are presented in the three separate essays in this booklet. The first essay, by critic and educator Alfred Kazin, addresses the state of literature in the United States, focusing upon financial pressures and the failure of current writers to see beyond today in their works. In the second essay, publisher Don Lacy reviews the history of the publishing industry and comments upon its current problems. In the final essay, former Commissioner of Education, Ernest L. Boyer discusses the interrelationships of books and education, arguing that books will not be replaced in schools, and that television, computers, and other technological tools will simply supplement them. (FL)

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The State of the Book World 1980

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Preface

At the Library of Congress on April 14, 1980, a literary critic, a publisher, and an educator presented their views about the current state of the book world. The three prominent speakers were Alfred Kazin, one of this country's foremost critics and a professor at City University of New York; Dan Lacy, senior vice president of McGraw-Hill, Inc.; and Ernest L. Boyer, formerly U.S. Commissioner of Education and now the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The Center for the Book is pleased, through its Viewpoint Series, to make their talks available to a wide audience.

The "State of the Book World 1980" program was the first in a series of annual, public assessments of the condition of the world of books that will be sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. The 1980 program addressed literary criticism, book publishing, and education in America. These papers were presented at the annual meeting of the center's National Advisory Board. The center was established in 1977 to stimulate appreciation of books, reading, and the printed word. Drawing on the resources of the Library of Congress, it strives to serve as a catalyst in the book and educational worlds at large, promoting books and reading through a variety of programs, projects, and publications. Its interests include the following topics: the educational and cultural role of the book— nationally and internationally; the history of books and printing; the future of the book, especially as it relates to new technologies and other media; authorship and writing; the printing, publishing, and preservation of books; access to and use of books and printed materials; reading; and literacy.

Two other volumes based on Center for the Book seminars are available: *Television, the Book, and the Classroom* (1978) and *Reading in America 1978* (1979). Each may be purchased for $4.95, prepaid, from the Information Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540.

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John Y. Cole
Executive Director
The Center for the Book

The Book Revue

Alfred Kazin

Well over forty thousand books were published in the United States last year. No one can blame the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New Republic*, the *New York Review of Books*, and certainly not the fragmentary book supplements indifferently included by Sunday newspapers in Washington, Chicago, or San Francisco for commenting on few of these books and for even listing just a handful. Editors and reviewers have their own tastes. New York sophisticates are not more likely to see, much less to discuss, a book of Western history published by the University of Montana Press than *Penthouse*, *Hustler*, *Screw*, etc., etc., are to publish a serious review article of some new edition of Sigmund Freud.

Like so much in American life, the book world is big, busy, commercial, and driven: not likely to be too aware of its factionalism, special interests, or many blinders. If complaints are made adjacent to the publishing world, they are made by a few writers and still independent publishers about the increasing presence in the trade of newspaper chains, radio companies, and the margarine trust. If complaints are made about the state of American *writing*, they are usually aired in small academic quarterlies by "experimental" writers whose most notable trait, as Edmund Wilson said of Cyril Connolly, is "that whether it's peace or war, Cyril complains it keeps him from writing." Has anyone noticed how much the English Department now shelters and promulgates the most advanced opinions on literature, especially by professors whose scorn for American materialism is shown by how little they write?

So much in American cultural life now depends on money from the government, the conglomerates, and the foundations

that I could reel off examples of commercialization and depart in perfect satisfaction. In good populist fashion I could locate in the Big Money the prime reason why there are so few real bookstores left even in New York that the Columbia University bookstore is now another Barnes and Noble supermarket featuring paperbacks and best-sellers. No wonder (I could go on grimly) that *Princess Daisy* sells like toothpaste, that Mailer gets a million-dollar advance from Little Brown! Fiction sells less well than sensational nonfiction, yet the novel as a form still has such prestige that *The Executioner's Song* sells because of Mailer's prodigious and *cinema*tic talent for uncovering the violence in all of us and the rapacity of his own confederates in the Garry Gilmore "deal." It is typical of the tribute that the big buck pays to literary tradition that Mailer and his publisher would still like this book to be taken as a "true-life novel."

The revelation, finally, of the unequaled oppression suffered by upper-bourgeois and professional American women with tenured husbands has made possible that $2.7 million sale in paperback of Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, the $3.5 million sale in paperback of Judy Blume's *Wifey*. Judith Krantz three months before the March 9 publication of *Princess Daisy* earned nearly five million dollars. I open a press release about Erich Segal's "new blockbuster, ten years after *Love Story*, *Man, Woman and Child*, to learn the publication plans for this story of a 'loving marriage on the brink of tragedy.' 200,000 copies on the first printing, $200,000 initial advertising budget. The book is already a Literary Guild Alternate, a Doubleday Book Club selection, a Reader's Digest Condensed Book Club selection, a Family Circle excerpt. Foreign language rights have been sold for 'record figures' to France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Portugal, Spain."

Which goes to show you— what? Nothing we do not already know about the hold, the lure of the big money in publishing as in academia, the meat business, show business. Do any of these stray items explain why you will almost never see a grown-up

man in business carrying even a best-seller? Why college students are obliged to "explicate" James Joyce or Ezra Pound without knowing where a sentence should end— or begin? Why American publishers are so particularly ruthless about remaindering their books? Why the paperback industry, pulping books when they cease to be "blockbusters," resembles nothing so much as the meat factory described by Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle?* Why it does not matter to American politics whether President Carter, as he tells us, is fond of Dylan Thomas, is reputed to have been influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr— or reads nothing at all? Why even reputable, long-established magazines have practically closed off the short story in favor of Teddy Kennedy's sexual history? And in their frantic effort to hit the stands increasingly resemble gamblers at Las Vegas who have staked their last funds on some big flash about the death of Jimmy Hoffa?

The million-dollar advances and earnings, the money mindedness of RCA putting even profitable Random House on the market— these are not just symptoms of some profound cultural malaise— they *are* the malaise. The malaise is the new book supermarkets that will give no earnest young reader a chance to discover anything unexpected; the magazines and book supplements that accept "cultural comment" only when written in a snappy prose whose function is to startle the reader rather than to enlighten him; the English departments featuring the triumph of "deconstructionism" over some helpless poem— and this to captive audiences of graduate students whose only chance to get an assistantship at Idaho State and to mark three hundred themes a week is to imitate this fictitious superiority by "creative" critics to the poems they discuss.

Our literary culture is in the same disarray as our politics, our city streets, our social order. This country is going through the profound inner crisis that Marx and Henry Adams foretold: technology of the future is already here and has outrun our existing social and economic relations. "The history of an epoch," said Einstein, "is the history of its instruments."

Frightened of our instruments yet increasingly dependent on them, we live intellectually and spiritually from crisis to crisis, hand to mouth. We have no believable goals for our society or ourselves. If books are more and more produced simply as commodities, just like movies, it is because books even for the minority of Americans that regularly buy them tend to be diet books, self-help books, information manuals, almanacs, thrillers. Of course film has largely usurped the *inevitability* of narrative that used to belong to the novel. But as that peculiarly incisive novelist V. S. Naipaul says in a wonderful essay on Conrad:

> More and more today, writers' myths are about the writers themselves: the work has become less obtrusive. The great societies that produced the great novels of the past have cracked. The novel as a form no longer carries conviction. Experimentation, not aimed at the real difficulties, has corrupted response. The novelist, like the painter, no longer recognizes his interpretive function; he seeks to go beyond it; and his audience diminishes. And so the world we inhabit, which is always new, goes by unexamined, made ordinary by the camera, unmeditated on; and there is no one to awaken a sense of true wonder.

Of course there are many good and even valuable books that sell— some even by scholars who seek to define our crises and awkwardly chart the inhuman future. Scholarly university presses can at least overlook some— not all— of the terrors of the marketplace and have written a bright chapter in our book history. More good and bad books are published than ever; there are more real and quack publishers; as there are more readers, more "successful" personalities to celebrate in our popular magazines, more facts on file.

When I think of the influence *on* American life of our two greatest literary periods— the 1850s and the 1920s— of

Emerson, Thoreau, Mark Twain, Dreiser, Mencken, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Edmund Wilson— my complaint is not just that the good books have so little lasting reverberation, but that our many splendid talents don't have enough scope in which to exercise influence. They seem to be part of the drift instead of exercising some mastery.

What is ominous about our literary state is that so much is accepted as ad hoc, temporary, spasmodic— and so has to be "sensational" in order to show some effect. American writing, featuring so many generation crises, leaping off the front pages with personality stars who are such for a month, fiction written from any sexual or ethnic complaint, resembles a parade in the rain. Nothing lasts. I am not so foolhardy as to pretend that I know *what* lasts— that I can even analyze to the depths what has no depth. Scott Fitzgerald has lasted. He predicted it, for he had "the stamp that goes into my books so that people can read it blind like Braille." Whatever the stamp is that made *Gatsby* last for all its plotfulness, *An American Tragedy* for all its barbaric epithets, *The Sound and the Fury* for all its obsessive family matter, Frost for all his sententiousness, or Stevens for all his contemplative coldness, I am quite sure that most of our leading novelists and poets just now do not have it.

One reason may be the inability to imagine the full impact on our mental life of the technological storm. Tom Wolfe is a very clever journalist, as audience minded as a strip teaser, and has written his most serious book, about the astronauts, in *The Right Stuff*. I am properly impressed with all his research, his sense of what is new and urgent about the condition of being an astronaut. I recognize the effort of his highly pepped-up prose to convey the danger, the thrill, above all the science, of being an astronaut. Wolfe knows what is going on in the remotest airfields and space stations; his style impersonates the razzmatazz, the "spritz," as stand-up comics used to call it, the frenetic flow and delirium of a special way of flying, talking, living. No one has recently entered so strongly into the mechanics of being an

astronaut; Mailer in *Of a Fire on the Moon*, a far more imaginative book, was with the computer boys and technicians in Houston and at Canaveral, not out in space.

But from the title down, all *The Right Stuff* says about the inner world of astronauts is that they have to show the "right stuff"— to be the super elite that so few can join. Wolfe is satisfied to show how the men— and their wives— respond to this unusual pressure, to show some extra manliness. Even when we grant that this world is entirely new to *everyone*, especially to the astronauts, the psychology of the book is military. We suspect that human beings in solitude and danger are more complex than this, and above all less *chatty*. Wolfe is an understandably conceited fellow with this Big Story and we respond to his assurance. But the only motivations he can explore are those that the astronauts officially know. This hardly gets to the rest of us. A significant factor in Wolfe's "blockbuster" is that he knows how to make the reader cower.

The rocket world, like everything excessive and supermechanical laid on us just now, may be too serious a subject for journalists to impersonate as literature. Wolfe can hardly be blamed if he thinks "literature" is old-fashioned. Only a journalist has the drive, the obstinacy, the encouragement from his publisher, to do a book like *The Right Stuff*. The most ambitious imaginative work to deal with technology in our lives, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, significantly became just another item in the academic department of "absurdity." Pynchon, unlike most literary fellows, at least majored in science; which may be why, like the cultural historian Jacques Barzun, he looks on science as "the great entertainment." Pynchon may just be a promising candidate for immortality because he is able to infuriate American big shots incapable of thinking an inch beyond their personal importance. The writers' advisory committee to the Pulitzer Prizes, which recommended *Gravity's Rainbow* for the fiction prize in 1974, was rudely overruled by a *Wall Street Journal* editor higher up on the

Pulitzer totem pole; no fiction prize was awarded that year. He explained, with some irritation, that he couldn't even read the damned thing.

This sounds promising for Pynchon; to read with the most common denominator is more important to the marketplace than any ominous hint of difficulty. We are reminded of the glorious days when *Moby Dick* was proclaimed a book "for bedlam," *Huckleberry Finn* "fit only for the slums," *The Waste-land* "a hoax." After all, John S. Sumner and the Society for the Suppression of Vice managed to make even Dreiser's book *The Genius* interesting by suppressing it. Nothing is now suppressible or censorable. Our literary thinking is so much geared to the hourly crisis that vulgarities like Joseph Heller's *Good As Gold* are indulged because Catch 22 became a byword for our anxious belief that nothing works. All is irrational. The fatalism of the man in the street, that perennial victim, has at last been matched by the cynicism of what are called "top intellectuals." So much alienation from American life is understandable— after all, what is a system for if not to satisfy us without limit? But when our precious "alienation" becomes abrasive at the expense of every bourgeois but ourselves, it becomes just another piece of American claptrap. Anti-Americanism is now the first refuge of many a scoundrel. What a shameful time when intellectuals can say: "It is too bad about the hostages in Iran, of course, but this may be an *educational* experience for our spoiled country."

Since the future is plainly here, and we cannot understand all it is doing to us— even *that* may not be the point that some far-off generation will know about us— it may just be the mysticism of knowledge that so much "outer space" involves us with. "It is because so much happens," Joe Christmas's grandmother lamented in *Light in August*. "Too much happens." We are no longer sure just where all this is happening. So a whole dimension of present literature is occupied by nostalgia.

Although there is a marked decline in history courses, in the sense of past, history has become the sense of crisis, of a

civilization in decline, of what one might well call the evaporation of history. Too many zigzag lines on our historical graphs lead on the one hand to instant history, on the other to the idealization of the frontier, the John Wayne syndrome so weepily exploited by Joan Didion in nicely simple books like *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. Nothing historical exists now for its own sake. Our sense of history is entirely contemporary, as witness Barbara Tuchman's study *A Distant Mirror*, which is not in fact about the distant middle ages but rather about the chain of wars that along with technology as a form of aggression rushing out of two terrible wars has so clearly subdued our minds.

The writer's problem is that we are locked into "today"— conceptually, superconsciously. We cannot see beyond the whirlwind of change in which we do spin round and round like the lovers in Dante's hell whose greatest pain was to remember past happiness, and so could not blame their temptation. We are waiting on history to carry us to some next stage of consciousness as once people waited on God to accomplish just that. But books are not written by History. You have to be strong in the legs to write, said Henry Thoreau. *That* was spiritual self-confidence.

Yet there is no country in the world with the buoyancy, the inborn sense of freedom, the explosive amount of universal material, that we present to the world as the great modern experiment – and feel in ourselves. It is our very disorder and factionalism, the fact that so many Americans have nothing in common but their living on this continent, even the violence and insecurity endemic in our shifting American lives, that in the past produced writers who were famous— for having nothing in common with each other. American disorder is our strength as well as our dismay. But what we never felt before— never, never!— was the sense that nothing is so real to us as ourselves, that there is so little to respect, that we have so few dreams.

Publishing Enters the Eighties

Dan Lacy

Publishing has been viewed and has viewed itself with alarm for decades. It was Henry Holt, I believe, who was sure that the bicycle craze, drawing potential readers from their books to the outdoors, spelled the doom of publishing around the turn of the century. Subsequent prophets have seen the cinema, radio, dancing, television, and the computer in succession as the terminal enemies of reading and hence of books and their publishers. Even the public library, that present mainstay of the book market, was once seen as bringing its collapse; and in spite of the house's later devotion to libraries, it was, I believe, a Lippincott who, in a desperate attempt to preserve publishing, urged an earlier publishers' organization to fund a research project to be undertaken by the American Medical Association to demonstrate the spread of disease through the circulation of library books.

If anything has been viewed with more alarm than the presumed impending failure of publishing, it is the magnitude of its success. Over the last thirty years this dying industry has grown in sales from $400 million to more than $4 billion and in titles published from about ten thousand to more than forty thousand. Though it is hard to define what is and isn't a book publisher and hence to count their number, that number has certainly more than doubled. The cost of books has risen sharply, but it is an increase much less than that of, say, theater or movie tickets, and the birth of the mass market paperback industry has made books far more widely available than ever before and relatively more cheaply. Enormous sums were raised and invested in publishing to make possible the production of the vast quantities of educational material required in the

postwar decades. The freedom that in the fifties seemed so gravely menaced by Joseph McCarthy and his colleagues and by the heirs of Anthony Comstock has been stoutly defended. Books have been principal weapons in challenging complacent establishments in government, industry, international relations, education, and race and a major force for social justice. Though serious authors are still disgracefully undercompensated by society, authors' rewards in general have grown and popular authors can now become millionaires as readily as seven-foot centers or twenty-game-winning pitchers.

The consequence of this success has been a series of denunciations of publishing as having fallen under the control of large and faceless corporations, as having become "big business," as having suppressed competition (or, alternatively, as having become so competitive as to ignore quality in the struggle for profits). The Congress and the Federal Trade Commission have both been moved by these protests to hold well-publicized, if inconclusive, hearings on concentration in publishing.

The bookstore has experienced the same curious phenomenon. It was an accepted and unexamined lament of the literary world that the bookstore was a dying institution, going the way of the blacksmith shop and, like it, remaining only to serve the needs of a small and traditional elite. When we awoke to the fact that what was really happening was a near-explosive growth of bookstores, burgeoning in shopping centers around the country, and in general, attractive, well financed, well managed, and well patronized, the wringing of hands continued. But now because it was feared that the power of the chains, which had opened many if not most of the new stores, would drive the independent bookstore, that true friend of literature, from the marketplace. And not even the growing prosperity of the stronger traditional as well as the newer bookstores could quiet the fears.

But obviously publishing has changed a great deal indeed, and sometimes in worrisome ways, and it is likely to change further

in the new decade. It has been threatened by high interest rates, energy costs, postal and other transportation expenses, alternative methods of storing and disseminating information— such as the computer data base and the video disc— as well as by a decline in school enrollments, whose rapid growth had been the principal stimulant of publishing in prior years. New opportunities, on the other hand, will be offered by continued rapid growth of a highly educated adult population— the fruit of the postwar baby boom and the postwar educational revolution that made a college education a normal rather than an exceptional experience— by technical advances in book manufacture made possible by the computer; by the increase in the amount of evolving scientific, technical, economic, and other information that needs to be collected and disseminated in our increasingly complex society; and by the general acceptance of English as the world language of science, technology, and business.

It is worth a quick retrospective look at the transformation of publishing over the last twenty-five or thirty years, so that we can better understand the forces that will be shaping its future. There were two fundamental changes. One was the direct result of the unprecedented surge in births following the close of World War II. The other proceeded from a need to achieve a broader market for books than the bookstore afforded.

The increase of the birthrate between 1945 and 1947 must stand as one of the most remarkable demographic events in history. In this brief interval, to put it in concrete terms, the output of babies jumped from 250 an hour to 400 an hour. The resultant great bulge in population succeeded a trough created by the low birth rates of the years of depression and war. By the early fifties this bulge had begun its march through the elementary schools, increasing enrollment, grade by grade, by about 60 percent. By 1960 it had hit the high schools, where it combined with a reduction in dropouts to double enrollment. By the mid-sixties the first of the postwar babies were overflowing the colleges, whose enrollments had already been

multiplied by social changes that made college attendance the rule rather than the exception. The confluence of this change with the baby boom actually increased college enrollment by tenfold from prewar years. All of these developments created an enormous demand for textbooks and other educational materials and for library books. This demand was greatly stimulated by federal legislation, including the Library Services Act and the National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which poured hundreds of millions of dollars into schools and libraries, and also by comparable increases in state aid to local institutions.

Further increases in the demand for books came from the rapid growth in the technological components of the economy—in television, aviation, petrochemicals, and computers, for example—with accompanying needs for vocational and professional works and also from the sharp increase in the export of American books, which replaced British and German books as the principal international carriers of science, technology, and scholarship generally.

To meet this demand, which brought a tenfold increase in the dollar volume of book sales over the last quarter century, a rapid investment of something on the order of $2.5 billion was necessary. Obviously this could not come from within the industry, since its post-tax profits at the beginning of the period hardly exceeded $25 million a year. If publishing was to meet the needs of the period, massive outside investment would be necessary. It came, and it came from a variety of sources—in part from individual investors who subscribed to the stock of formerly private companies that "went public" during these years. But a much larger investment came from other corporations: magazine and newspaper publishers, broadcasters, electronics companies, general conglomerates, and, more recently, foreign owners, who started or expanded publishing operations or bought up existing ones.

In consequence, the privately owned, family managed

company— though it continues to exist, as witnessed by Scribner's, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, and Doubleday— is no longer the dominant or characteristic form of the publishing house. Instead, the bulk of publishing is now carried on by publicly held corporations, many of them quite large, and perhaps the majority of them parts or subsidiaries of giant firms whose principal concerns are other than book publishing. Firms like CBS, Newhouse, ABC, Time, Inc., Times Mirror, IBM, Xerox, ITT, and Raytheon are major factors in book publishing. Others, like the Western Pacific Railroad and American Express, have contemplated entering the field but for one reason or another thought better of it.

This is to say that publishing has tended to be assimilated into American corporate enterprise generally. Annual budgets, profit goals, committee decisions, and assets control are part of the apparatus of publishing as they are of the manufacture of furniture or razor blades or automobiles. It is not unknown for a computer-generated estimate of discounted-cash-flow internal rate-of-return on investment to be a principal factor in the decision whether to publish a book. And indeed comparative rates of return on investment necessarily provide the principal criterion for deciding on the allocation of resources among different divisions of a large publishing house or between publishing and other activities of a more complex enterprise. One can decide that one book is better than another and hence, on quality alone, better deserves publishing. But if one publishes computer-based information services as well as books— and the funds to invest are the stockholders' and not one's own— how else except by estimated return does one decide in which to invest? And if one owns both a publishing house and a baseball team, how else decide whether a million dollars could be better spent on an advance for a reliably best-selling novelist or a reliably twenty-game winning southpaw free agent?

To what extent are the fears justified that this absorption of publishing into the general patterns of the corporate world will

suppress freedom and individuality in publishing and substitute commercial for literary judgments, with a consequent degradation in the quality of published work? On the face of it, one would expect to find good reason for concern, but on inquiry, the evidence seems elusive. Far more, not fewer, books are published. The flood of scholarly publishing continues in full spate. A dozen or more novels appear every day the publishing houses are open, overflowing the capacity of the most avid reader and even of the most comprehensively acquisitive library. No restrictions on freedom are visible: books blast away more stridently than ever at all establishments, whether of government or of business or education or religion. And I believe it would be hard to discover any really worthy manuscript that has sought and failed to find a publisher.

Why hasn't the incorporation of publishing into the business establishment produced more of the feared results? One reason is that a concentration on profits is not the new phenomenon we sometimes think. Indeed the small, independent publisher always experienced a merciless need for profits to keep going from one publishing season to the next, and cannier businessmen than the great publishing figures of the traditional past would be hard to find. Indeed the well-financed large contemporary publisher is in a better position to take a long view of profits and often does. To mention the company I work for only because I know its list best, it would have been impossible for McGraw-Hill to undertake such projects as the publication of the Boswell Papers, the China Studies, Atlantic Policy, the 1980s Project series of the Council on Foreign Relations, or various educational series of the Carnegie Corporation without drawing on the broad resources of the corporation. And I am sure many other houses could offer similar examples. Even in more literary areas of publishing, it would be difficult to discern any significant difference in the Random House, Knopf, and Pantheon lists in days of their independence and during their residency in the RCA empire.

But even to the degree that corporate weight may stifle publishing sensitivity and initiative, literally hundreds of small, often newly fledged houses are eager to seek out any niche unfilled by the corporate grants. Nor— as the names of Dodd, Mead; Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Atheneum; and Scribner's remind us— have all middle-sized private publishing houses departed the mainstream of publishing.

An added concern has been expressed recently, by authors and some independent publishers, not so much about size in itself, or corporate dominance in itself, as about mergers that have brought general book club and mass market paperback houses into common ownership with trade houses. Doubleday, for example, now owns Dell and Literary Guild, as well as a host of smaller book clubs. Simon and Schuster and Pocket Books dwell together in the mansions of Gulf and Western. MCA is the host for both Putnam and other trade lines and Berkeley and Pyramid among paperbacks. Ballentine nestles with Knopf, Random House, and Pantheon in the arms of the Newhouse chain, while another newspaper empire, the Times Mirror Company, associates New American Library with its other book publishing enterprises. In the vast halls of CBS reside Fawcett and Popular Library as well as Holt, Rinehart & Winston. And Time, Inc., in addition to Time-Life Books, joins Little Brown and Book-of-the-Month Club in common ownership.

The fear is that authors published by independent houses will have only narrowed access to selections by book clubs and paperback houses, which will be presumed to prefer titles from their sister houses. But this is not likely to be a major problem. A book club or paperback house that deliberately passed over more profitable selections from other sources to give preference to less marketable books from an allied publisher would suffer the market consequences of mismanagement. In concrete example, no head of Book-of-the-Month Club is going to let suffer the profits of his own operation, to which his own salary, bonuses, and prospects of advancement are linked, in order to

do a favor to his colleague at Little Brown, so that the latter can have his profits, bonus, and prospects climb. Corporate loyalty does not rise so far. There may well be some inherent unhealthiness in the arrangement and some temptations to occasional abuse; but it is not probable that corporate size in itself will threaten quality publishing.

It is unlikely that the years immediately ahead will involve as much structural change in publishing as those through which we have passed. Now that the population bulge produced by the sudden postwar rise in births has passed or is passing into adulthood, we confront dwindling, not explosively growing, school and college enrollments. Though there will no doubt be continued growth in the sales of both trade and professional books to the larger adult market, the decade ahead is not one in which publishing is likely to experience such dramatic growth as to demand new structures or new sources of funding. On the contrary, it has become increasingly unattractive to corporate giants. RCA has disposed of its Random House-Knopf-Pantheon domain; ABC declined an opportunity to acquire Macmillan; ITT has announced its intention to sell off its publishing subsidiary; General Electric long ago closed down its joint publishing venture with Time, Inc.

One change may be a lessening importance of national boundaries. The acceptance of English as the preferred language of scientific and technical publishing in Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia and the abandonment of the British Publisher's Association's Traditional British Market Agreement have joined to unify a world market for single English-language editions, and such editions will very likely tend to replace the separate British and American editions even of trade books. This prospect has invited direct British entry into the American market; and German and Dutch firms have entered that market as well. Correspondingly, the presence of American publishers abroad, especially in the professional, technical, and vocational fields, will no doubt continue to grow.

The other major development— or related pair of developments— in post-World War II publishing was the rise of book clubs and mass market paperbacks to the extraordinary position they now occupy. Both were known before the war, book clubs indeed since the midtwenties, but neither attained its full growth until after World War II.

Today the vast majority of books bought by individuals are paperbacks or book club offerings. Original trade publishing in hardcover has come to play something of the role of the legitimate theater, introducing new works to relatively small audiences, with the more successful being reoffered to vastly larger audiences through films and television. And the more popular modes of distribution have become financially indispensable to trade publishing, which now derives about 15 percent of its income from the sale of subsidiary rights. Without this hefty revenue almost all trade publishers would operate at a loss, and most could not survive at all in their traditional business.

Though in general I do not share the views of the doomsayers or viewers-with-alarm about publishing, the congruence of a number of the factors we have discussed does, in one particular area, give reason for concern. An economic organization that places most mainstream publishing in the hands of large corporations with highly rationalized profit orientation; the growing role of the hard-merchandising chain store with an essential emphasis on fast-moving titles; the predominance of mass market paperbacks and major book clubs, offering the possibility of enormous sales, but only for a limited number of titles; the dependence of trade publishing on subsidiary rights income from just those titles; printing technologies that offer their major economies to very long runs; and television advertising and talk-show promotion, offering an enormously powerful new marketing tool, but one available only for books with very large potential sales— all these factors combine to produce an unhealthy preoccupation with the "big" book, the commercial

best-seller. Such books have become enormously profitable to author, publisher, and bookseller alike. The serious book of high quality, on the other hand, increasingly pays coolie wages to its author, is published at a growing loss, and has difficulty finding its way into bookstores.

This trend has by no means reached the level of disaster. Publishers still compete avidly for authors of high quality. Though authors like Judith Krantz and Harold Robbins are far more abundantly rewarded, no publisher would not hunger for an Alfred Kazin or Saul Bellow or John Hersey or John Updike on his list. And every conceivable kind of book of every level of quality still finds a publisher somewhere, as evidenced by the quadrupling of titles published in the recent era.

But the principal energies of the most effective mechanisms for publishing and marketing books are concentrated on relatively few titles, too often of shallow substance indeed, which sell literally in the millions of copies each. Conversely, though the book of limited potential— the experimental novel, the volume of poetry by a not-yet famous writer, the work of solid but quiet merit, the scholarly history, the work of literary criticism— is still published, it is increasingly likely that it will have to be published outside the mainstream by other than major commercial houses. University presses have long borne and increasingly bear the burden of publishing most scholarly works in the humanities and the social sciences, and they publish an increasingly large proportion of poetry. Small, independent, and personal houses, which begin easily and flower and disappear with equal ease, are becoming the more likely refuge of the new and experimental writer. Yet these two kinds of alternatives to the central publishing establishment face special difficulties. The critical financial situation of most universities curtails both their support of their presses and the acquisitions funds of their libraries, which constitute the presses' principal single market— thus striking scholarly publishing a double blow. When the largest corporations must pay 20 percent interest,

small personal houses may not be able to borrow at all to meet the seasonal needs that all publishers confront. And postal rates, which have increased far more rapidly than any other cost of publishing, though they affect all publishers and their customers, hit hardest the small publishers who must ship by mail rather than truck and often in single copies.

Nevertheless, the problems that most threaten the book seem to me to come largely from outside publishing. They relate in part to the status of words themselves, for the only purpose of the book is to be the preserver and bearer of words.

Words are uniquely human instruments. They are necessarily abstractions. We reach with words into the swirling totality about us and pull out fragments of meaning, like an atomic scientist reaching with gloved hands and lengthy tongs through a protective wall to grasp unbearable reality without touching it. When we speak of life, we remove ourselves from the direct experience of it and select out one or another aspect for examination, comparison, analysis. And when we use the written word we are doubly removed from the ineffable reality itself—the speaker's words are withdrawn from the immediacy of his emotion, from the context in which he spoke, and stretched forth upon the page in unchanging form to be read and thought on and reexamined at a distance in space and time.

Yet if words, especially written words, are means by which we distance ourselves from life, they are by this very reason the means by which we comprehend and master it; give it, in a quite literal sense, meaning; and select the aspects significant to us and impose upon them patterns of order. They are the means by which we transcend experience to enter into understanding.

But if words are all abstractions, they are also all, inescapably, metaphors. By a word we select one aspect out of the formless totality and give it meaning by associating it with like things arrayed in the patterns of our minds. When we say a girl's eyes are blue, we mean they are like violets and the sky and the sea.

When we use the word "yellow" our sentence is haunted with sunlight and gold and buttercups and cowardice. Words not only impose meaning on life through their power to abstract; because of their inherently metaphoric and poetic character the meaning they impose is a human one.

Much in contemporary society turns away from both these aspects of words. Many yearn simply to feel the flow of life rather than think about it— to immerse themselves in it wordlessly, whether to let it flow by them on the television screen, to listen with perhaps drug-induced hypnosis to the beat of its sound, or to lose self-awareness in wordless meditation. For others, the overlay of metaphor inherent in words is a blurring from which overtones and resonances must be scraped clean. The language of science is an effort to attain precision at the cost of metaphor. It defines colors in wavelengths of radiated light to avoid those haunted words like "blue" and "yellow"; it falls into silence when it must describe the unquantifiable and can find no meaning or use for words like "love" or "beauty." The computer stammers even with a person's bare name, which may refer to his or her whole persona, his or her being as child, parent, lover, worker, patriot, traitor, sinner, saint. It prefers to know the person only as a number which isolates his or her one quality as depositor in that bank, an employee with that Social Security account, or a driver with that license and suppresses the whole penumbra of being that surrounds a name.

They are wordless alike: the "you know, . . . like" of the young shrinking from the definition of experience, the meditator who by not thinking hopes to open himself to the true fullness of life, the computer's swift cerebration that knows only "1" and "0" as tools to organize all fact. Both sacrifice the peculiarly *human* power of words, not only to experience life but to organize and give it meaning and yet to give it an organization impressed by human mind, a meaning in human terms. The future of the book, I dare say, and indeed the future of

life's quality depends on the preservation of a respect, an awe, for this peculiar and magic power of the word itself.

And yet another trend beyond the reach of publishers has affected the role of literature and hence of the books in which it is embodied, a trend common to all the arts. The achievement of that communion between author and reader, artist and viewer, composer and audience by which creation is consummated depends on the possession of a common vocabulary of words and forms and structures of meaning. Over the years this common coin grows worn with use so that the freshness and force of communication is blurred and dimmed. Young writers and painters and composers yearn to shatter them for new forms that, they feel, will better express their meaning. Better express indeed, but not better convey that meaning if the new-minted forms are not part of the audience's currency. Communion fails, full creation is aborted, and the artist's work in whatever field becomes a solipsism, to which he retreats with a greater willingness because of his growing contempt for and alienation from society.

One senses today how few are the artists in any field, at any adequate level of competence, who feel the strong central currents of society surge through them to shape their work— in the sense that Shakespeare and Haydn and da Vinci felt at one with their times. In another day even those creators and thinkers who felt most alienated and hostile to the dominant forces of their times— such as Karl Marx, Zola, or Brecht— yet felt society itself important— quite literally terribly important— and themselves and their work important in challenging it. They were therefore called forth to their utmost not only to express but to convey their meanings, to reach minds, to engage themselves to the fullest with the life of their time— whether as its voice or its foe. I do not find it so today.

But let me return from this speculative digression into literature, in which I made no profession of competence, and

return to the humbler world of publishing. Here, for all this foreboding, all is not gloom.

The delight of publishing is that it remains an almost infinitely varied and complex, anarchic, constantly changing, unsystematic mess. It remains highly responsive to demand, able to supply abundantly whatever the market demands, sensitive to every small and specialized need. Gothic novels, chess manuals, advanced mathematical treatises, poetry in its variety from Rod McKuen to Robert Bly, pornography, biblical exegeses, black humor, and engineering handbooks pour forth, ready for whoever has money in hand. In contrast to the 1950s when the contribution of the new technology was to make it possible to print long runs of a few books cheaply, the emerging technology of our day promises to make it possible to print short runs of many books— even a copy at a time on demand. This will make it possible to respond to even smaller and more specialized needs. The facile readiness to shape itself sedulously to the marketplace, which many think demeaning in publishing, is in fact its greatest virtue. Far better publishing whose cupidity drives it eagerly to give us what we want, however mindless and tasteless our wants may sometimes be, than publishing that gives us what *it* thinks good for us.

But this does mean that the health of publishing, both quantitatively and qualitatively, depends on the health of its market. Social need does not automatically express itself as demand in the marketplace. It has been one of the functions of government, through educational and library appropriations, to translate social needs into market demands. Library appropriations in particular have played a major role in creating the kind of market that provides a counterweight to best-sellerdom and evokes the best in publishing. Libraries, far more than individuals, are able to spread their purchases across a broad spectrum of books and solid quality. Only small markets are needed to sustain serious books, and libraries are the critical component of that market.

Library appropriations have suffered grievously in these days of federal austerity, state proposition thirteens, and university crises. Where they have not been cut in current dollars, their meagerly augmented funds have not nearly kept pace with inflation. Rising salary and energy costs demand a steadily increasing proportion of limited budgets, and of the less and less remaining for acquisitions, serials den and a larger and larger part. The actual number of books bought by libraries has dropped sharply.

It is nowhere written that publishers are guaranteed a profit, and one need not mourn because some of their revenue is curtailed. But it *is*, or ought to be, a matter of deep public concern from a qualitative view that the very market that challenges publishing to its best is diminished. Publishing is diminished along with it.

One of the soundest achievements of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress could be to help create a public demand for substance and quality and range and variety in books. Publishing will respond.

The Book and Education

Ernest L. Boyer

I remember my first day of school. Just before I left to walk the short distance between our house and the schoolyard I asked my mother whether I would learn to read that day. She said no, not the first day. Reading would come later.

But she was wrong. That first day we were taught four words, "I go to school." From that day on I have not doubted that books and education are completely intertwined.

And yet this has not always been true. For the ancient Greeks and the Romans it was not reading that was the basic activity of education, it was listening– listening and memorizing. In the ancient world memory was a skill highly prized.

Frances Yates in her book *The Art of Memory* describes how feats of memorizing were often performed with the aid of floor-plans of buildings. A student would walk through a public building and learn the layout of the rooms; then, as he memorized a section of Homer, he would associate small sections with different rooms and be able to recall what he learned by mentally walking once more through the building and reciting the lines associated with each room.

Aids such as this were important because memory was important. Schools were conducted with a teacher speaking and a student listening and remembering. Since books, which can be returned to again and again, had such a small role to play, it was memory that was the basic tool of the educated man.

Books did not begin to become an important part of the process of education until the rise of the great medieval universities.

One of the favored ways of teaching in the early years of the university was for an instructor to stand before a class and read

word for word from one of the great classical texts. He might pause occasionally to give his own commentaries, but more likely he would not. He would read and the students would copy down every word.

Each student would end the course with knowledge of one of the great books— and with a copy of it. To teach was, quite literally, to give a book.

The influence of the book in education has grown steadily and dramatically through the centuries but it is only in the last three hundred years or so that reading and learning have become so completely intertwined. Until thirty years ago books were the unchallenged teachers, but only three decades ago we were just beginning to hear the claim heard so much since, that the vast array of the new electronic media, then just gaining widespread use, would soon replace the book as the primary tool of education or at least greatly diminish its role. Since that claim was first made, one generation has passed through the schools and another is beginning, and now is the time to review the record and decide what the future of the book in education will be.

What, in fact, will be the teachers of the coming decades?

One candidate is television. Hardly an aspect of our culture has gone unaffected by it. Under its influence, the very nature of childhood has changed. The perceptions of themselves and of their world which children now bring to school are not what they were in the age before television.

Television is one of the age's new teachers. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways it introduces children to the culture, and in so doing helps shape that culture too. TV tells us instantly what is going on— even though it frequently confuses the immediate with the urgent. Because of television a child can orbit into space, walk with Neil Armstrong on the moon, or travel with the whales to the bottom of the sea.

And yet in teaching ideas, concepts, and all but the briefest information, television is less successful. Television does have

limitations. Its speed of delivery is fixed. A person may learn no faster— or no slower— than the voice of the narrator and the sequence of images will allow.

In this the book is more versatile. The book is better suited to the process of inquiry. It may be read quickly or slowly depending on the material and the capacity of the reader. It may be read in any order— and so be fit to the interests of the reader, not the designs of the author. Information may be extracted at random. It may be returned to over and over again, making memory of specific items less important.

Television is the most immediate, the book the more versatile. Both will be the teachers of the future.

The computer is the book's other major competitor. As with television, frequent claims have been made that this too will soon replace the book. The most recent comes from Christopher Evans in his new book *The Micro Millenium.* Evans predicts that "the 1980's will see the book as we know it, and as our ancestors created and cherished it, begin a slow but steady slide into oblivion." Computers will take over, he declares, because they store more information, and because their information can be more rapidly retrieved.

He is right of course about the information. There is no question that in its ability to store vast amounts of data and then retrieve it at mind-boggling speed the computer is far superior to the book. But this applies to only a particular sort of information— statistical, quantitative— the sort that is capable of translation into the binary cipher of computer language. And probably for the very reason that computers now exist to store this sort of data, it is being gathered at an incredible rate. The more we use computers the more dependent on them we become. Their importance can only increase.

And yet they will not replace the book. Knowledge is not synonymous with data, and the sort of knowledge found in most books is simply not suited for electronic storage. Data is accumulating in all areas with such speed that computers are essential to house it for future sorting and use, but unfortunately we are not accumulating knowledge— and certainly not

wisdom— at anywhere near the same rate. As a matter of fact, I sometimes fear that the more we gather data, the less we gather wisdom.

Evans describes the books of the future as tiny silicone chips which can be slipped into electronic readers so that the text can be read from a viewing screen. He envisions, also, the possibilities of "smart encyclopedias," which by the late 1980s will be able to do their own research. Perhaps something like these will find a place in general use, although the superior versatility and appeal of the codex over the viewing screen should not be underestimated.

But in more important areas computers will find a place as teachers. Already in use are desktop models with screens which combine all the possibilities inherent in television graphics with the teaching possibilities of computer programming.

These are programs which may be altered to fit different abilities of different people and which allow a student to respond at his or her own speed. Computers of this sort will soon be a common part of schools and many homes. They will be particularly valuable to teachers in the early grades and offer exciting new possibilities for the teaching of reading, mathematics, and even music.

There are two points buried here. First, the book is *not* going to be replaced as a major tool in education, but, second, from now on it will have company. From the 1980s onward the computer and television will join the book as teachers. And simply because we now have a choice in what tools to use we must learn as completely as possible the full capabilities of each, beginning with the oldest, the book. The book has never been used as effectively as it might, simply because few students learn to read as effectively as they could. This must change.

The place to start is with the very process of learning to read. Until the turn of the century children were taught from books that were only slightly less difficult than those their parents might read. Generation after generation grew up on McGuffey's

reader. The words were hard, the pictures were dull, but the text contained ideas— sermons, if you will— which the older generation thought children ought to learn.

At the beginning of this century, however, reading in the public schools was captured by researchers. Psychologists studied the vocabulary of young children. They counted the frequency of words and from their "word lists" textbooks were constructed— textbooks which made no attempt to transmit information, to clarify ideas, to stimulate thought, or even to bring pleasure to the reader. They were expected merely to introduce students to familiar *words.* In that they succeeded. But the result was such stirring passages as, "Look, Jane, look. Run, Spot, run." They taught words, but with a text not worth the effort.

I do not suggest, of course, that we return to McGuffey readers, and neither can we ignore the so-called reading readiness of children. If reading is to be a central part of education, however, we must fill our books not with "scientifically balanced" lists of words but with inspiration, information, and ideas.

Further, if reading is to be truly taught well, then writing must be given more emphasis than it now is in our schools. Writing is the most creative and most demanding form of self-expression. Writing reveals emotions and thoughts. Where students are taught to write with care they will, I am convinced, be better able to read with care— critically, thoughtfully, appreciatively.

Finally, students must be taught that there are many ways to read a book.

One way is to listen to it, to sit with a book and let it have its say from beginning to end. This is reading which is carefree, uncritical, and highly entertaining.

But there is also reading as conversation. This is a halting sort of reading, the kind where the reader might finish one passage nodding in agreement, but finish the next muttering angrily to

himself, then read a third passage and jump out of his chair carrying the book with him to reread the passage to someone else because it makes so well a point he had been trying to make just the other day.

This is reading that always ends with comments scribbled in the margins. It is an active involvement of the personalities of two people, the author and the reader.

There is a third way to read a book. That is to interrogate it. The book is called forward as a witness, to be examined and cross-examined. Specific information is sought, and accuracy is essential, so the answers of no single book are to be trusted without substantiation. One book is put beside another and a third; answers to the same question are taken, compared, and reexamined. The reader is the examiner and judge.

There is also a fourth way to read a book. That is to explore it. This is the excitement of the browser, the ability to discover through accident, approaching a book without regard for the arrangement intended by the author and so possibly to find a new arrangement, a new way to assemble the same facts, or an entirely unique association of ideas. Of all the ways to read a book, this has had the least encouragement in schools, and yet it is the most exciting and most creative.

On my first day of school I was given something magical, the ability to read. Since that day my appreciation for the book and the part it plays in the activity of learning has gone from admiration, to wonder, to awe. There was a time when the mind was only as large as the human skull that held it. Now it is as large as all the books a man or woman can master. And now with television and the computer, the frontier stretches even further. Television extends human sight, computers extend memory and ability for calculation. Books extend wisdom. It is now our task to fit together these tools, the new ones with the old, and make learning something truly exciting.

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